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## Spotlight On....Organizing Writing: Cohesive Elements

In the [October 2014 edition](#) of Literacy Links, we explored the use of text structures as a tool for organizing writing so that readers can more easily follow the author's line of reasoning. In this month's edition, we will take a look at another essential tool for crafting clear organization in writing—cohesive elements. “If narrative and expository structures are framework for writing, cohesive elements are the glue that holds the structural elements together” (Cali, 2003). Cohesive elements are generally sequence and transition words that establish logical connections between sentences, paragraphs and sections of writing. Cohesive elements tell readers what to do with the information being presented. They “function as signs for readers that tell them how to think about, organize and react to old and new ideas” (University of North Carolina Writing Center, 2012).

Cohesive elements provide readers with clues about the order in which different parts of the writing are being presented as well as about the relationships between those parts. “When placed wisely, sequence and transition words guide readers through pieces by showing how ideas progress, relate and/or diverge” (Culham, 2014). Sequence words indicate time and order (e.g., later, then, meanwhile, next) while transition words indicate relationships between ideas (e.g., however, also, clearly). Cohesive elements can take the form of single words, phrases, sentences or even entire paragraphs.

Teaching writers a wide range of sequence and transition words and how to use them between sections, between paragraphs and within paragraphs can lead to much more logical writing and well-developed arguments. Cohesive elements also connect well with particular text structures. For instance, when a compare and contrast structure is utilized, it is beneficial for writers to know words and phrases such as also, as though, similarly, yet, whereas, and conversely. Writers can also ask themselves some questions that may help them identify when they need to attend to cohesive elements during the revision process. Examples of some useful questions to prompt attention to cohesive elements include:

One day I will find the right words,  
and they will be simple.

~Jack Kerouac



Let me live, love, and say it well in  
good sentences.

~Sylvia Plath

- Does my writing follow logically from beginning to end?
- Are the ideas and actions connected?
- Does my writing seem choppy or jumpy?
- Does my writing need signposts to better direct the reader?

Additional resources to support educators with teaching cohesive elements for writing can be found in the Online Resources and Professional Text sections below.

## Online Resources

The following online resources provide tools for helping students use writing as a tool for building understanding.

### [Reading Rockets](#)

This link to the Reading Rockets site provides an excellent explanation of the benefits of teaching students to recognize and use transition words as tools for building reading comprehension and for improving writing. Additionally, links to instructional resources for teaching transitions words as well as examples of mentor texts that effectively utilize transition words are featured.

### [30 Ideas for Teaching Writing from the National Writing Project](#)

In 2005, the National Writing Project compiled 30 key instructional strategies for educators to use to address common writing needs. This award winning collection contains a wealth of sound ideas, including two that specifically support use of cohesive elements. The first of these is a technique titled [Framing Devices](#) and the second is a strategy called [Prominent Feature Analysis](#).

### [Writing Transitions from OWL at Purdue](#)

This brief description of writing transitions appropriate to secondary and post-secondary writing provides many examples of transitional words and phrases along with their purposes.

## Professional Texts

Here is a professional text and an article about the use of transitions that provide ideas for teaching cohesive elements to organize writing.



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[www.maine.gov/doe/calendar/](http://www.maine.gov/doe/calendar/)



## **The Writing Thief: Using Mentor Texts to Teach the Craft of Writing**

**Ruth Culham, 2014**

It's been said that good writers borrow while great writers steal. Writing thieves read widely, dive deeply into texts, and steal bits and pieces from great texts as models for their own writing. Ruth Culham admits to being a writing thief-and she wants you and your students to become writing thieves, too. A major part of becoming a writing thief is finding the right mentor texts to share with students. Within this book, discover more than 90 excellent mentor texts, along with straight-forward activities that incorporate the traits of writing across informational, narrative and argument modes (Review from International Reading Association, 2014).

### **Transitions**

**University of North Carolina, 2012**

This handout from the University of North Carolina's Writing Center provides clear guidance for writers about how to use transitions to "glue ideas together." The handout includes an explanation of the role transitions serve in writing, examples of strategies students can use to identify where transitions are needed and examples of transitions that support logical relationships writers typically make between ideas.

### **Children's Literature**

Here are a couple of excellent mentor texts for showing students effective use of cohesive elements.

#### **Here, Kitty Kitty: Monopoly Rolls Out Its New Token**

**(Online Article by Chris Morris for *Plugged In*, 2013)**

The makers of the classic board game, Monopoly, held a contest to replace one of the traditional game pieces with a new token. In this article, Chris Morris links together short, fact-filled paragraphs by using cohesive elements making it a great model for writers to study (Culham, 2014).

#### **Three Hens and a Peacock**

**Lester Laminack, 2014**

In this amusing and award winning text, author Lester Laminack



Description begins in the writer's imagination, but should finish in the reader's.

~Stephen King



fluently applies transitions to result in a mixture of constructions with more traditional sentences. Additionally, the text teaches a lesson about not underestimating the value of others' work (Culham, 2014).

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